

August 26, 2016

Marie Mercurio, Senior Planner
Boston Redevelopment Authority
1 City Hall Sq, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02210

Re: Draft PLAN: JP/ROX

Dear Marie:

LivableStreets Alliance, Boston Cyclists Union and WalkBoston appreciate the work the BRA has done thus far to ensure that neighborhood development in Jamaica Plain and Roxbury aligns with residents' wishes and is done in a sustainable way that preserves neighborhood character. However, our organizations believe that the policies and recommendations outlined in the BRA's draft plan can be improved. Washington Street is a high-density, transit-accessible corridor, with low rates of automobile usage and a high share of residents traveling via transit, bicycle and walking. The policies and recommendations outlined in the BRA's report should further advance these aspects of the neighborhood. Please find comments from the LivableStreets Advocacy Committee, WalkBoston, Boston Cyclists Union, and local residents below. Many of these recommendations align with work WalkBoston is pursuing in partnership with the Elderly Commission's Age-Friendly Boston initiative and other city agencies to improve safety and comfort for seniors and other vulnerable populations.

First, we would like to recommend general improvements for the area in the following categories: Policy Initiatives, Pedestrian Safety and Infrastructure, Bicycle Infrastructure, Transit Improvements, Placemaking and the Public Realm, and Parking. In addition, we recommend a number of specific infrastructure improvements throughout the PLAN: JP/ROX study area, which are detailed later in this letter.

Policy Initiatives

- Commit to Complete Streets, Vision Zero, and other policies and standards that the City of Boston has adopted – don't just aspire. Roadway design should prioritize pedestrians, bicycles, transit, and personal motor vehicles, in that order. Vehicular capacity/level of service should not trump other needs.
 - Page 120 of the draft plan mentions that traffic calming, improved sidewalk and pedestrian crossings, and bike facilities should be created "where possible." This statement does not go far enough and the words "where possible" should be eliminated from the final plan. Boston has committed to implementing Vision Zero, which requires that streets be engineered in ways that prevent vulnerable road users from being killed by motor vehicles when motor vehicle operators make errors. The term "where possible" implies that nothing will change on a street unless no parking spaces are lost and motor vehicle traffic speeds are not impacted.

- Implement fast and flexible programs for infrastructure that advance Complete Streets and Vision Zero goals. Use flex posts, paint and other inexpensive and temporary materials to demonstrate innovative roadway treatments such as physically separated bike lanes, curb extensions, and pedestrian plazas.

Pedestrian Safety and Infrastructure

- Improve pedestrian safety through appropriately configured WALK signals.
 - All WALK signals should be on automatic recall, unless there are streets with very low pedestrian volumes.
 - All WALK signals should be concurrent with traffic, unless there are high volumes of turning traffic or special circumstances (e.g. locations near schools or senior centers) that should be further reviewed.
 - All concurrent WALK signals should provide a leading pedestrian interval (LPI) of 6 seconds.
 - All WALK signals should provide countdowns that give sufficient time for pedestrians to cross the street. At major intersections the timing should be set to accommodate the MUTCD standard of a pedestrian walking 3.0 ft/sec. (MUTCD Section 4E.06, Paragraph 14)
- Establish an aggressive minimum standard for distance between crosswalks (signalized or not) and corresponding installation of new crosswalks at minor intersections and mid-block locations.
- Create landscaped pedestrian refuge areas where possible at unsignalized crosswalks.
- Install sidewalk bump-outs at all pedestrian crossings where appropriate for pedestrian safety.

Bicycle Safety and Infrastructure

- Determine feasibility of implementing separated bike lanes along all collector and arterial streets.
 - On page 133 of the draft plan, fig. 89 and fig. 90 depict two different conceptual drawings of bike infrastructure. We recommend the fig. 89 conceptual drawing of a separated bike lane.
- Create bike lanes/separated bike lanes, not sharrows, on major streets, and build as much as possible using paint on existing streets.
- Expand Hubway service and stations according to station density requirements and locations within a quarter mile radius of MBTA stations, including at transit hub Forest Hills MBTA Station.

- Bicycle and pedestrian access to the Southwest Corridor should remain as safe as it is today or be made safer.

Transit Improvements

- Study additional options for improving buses and expanding BRT. Options may include extending the Silver Line from Dudley through Forest Hills as an alternative to the BRT corridor planned for Columbus Ave.
- Use transit priority signals and far-side bus stops to provide better bus service, instead of queue jump lanes as currently recommended in the draft plan. Far-side stops are better for bus operations and also help to daylight crosswalks to oncoming traffic.
- Ensure that buses are accommodated if future development takes place at the Arborway Yard and either redesign or relocate bus operations. The memorandum of agreement between the City and the MBTA calls for building a permanent \$250 million facility to house 118 buses.

Placemaking and the Public Realm

- Install attractive, high-visibility, main-street-style, pedestrian-scale lighting to not only provide better illumination but to help visually narrow the street and signal to motorists that they are not on a high-speed arterial but in a village/neighborhood commercial center.
- Install attractive and coordinated benches/street furniture, parklets, public art and other placemaking features
- Minimize curb cuts through use of shared driveways and ensure that they have the tightest possible curb radii and level sidewalks.
- Create more robust incentives to encourage store owners to remove metal security covers for storefronts or to replace them with less visually obtrusive interior-mounted alternatives.
- Where appropriate, require setbacks for larger buildings to accommodate wider sidewalks and sidewalk cafes. Any residential or non-storefront, non-active ground-floor uses permitted to front on Washington St should require deeper, well landscaped setbacks, such as those along Marlborough St. in the Back Bay.

Parking

- Conduct a comprehensive neighborhood parking study to assess the proper regulations needed neighborhood wide.
 - Regulate on-street parking in business districts for 15% vacancy using a combination of time limits and metering to encourage turnover.

- Assess residential streets, especially near transit stations, for viability of resident parking zones. Permits could be required during the day if people from outside the neighborhood are parking there during the day. Make residential permits required during the day and/or during the night if overnight parking by non-residents seems to be an issue.
- Institute recommended parking ratios ranging from 0 to .7, consistent with research suggesting parking ratios of .5 to .7 spaces per unit in neighborhoods with similar mode share and vehicle ownership rates as this section of Boston. “Decoupling” usage of private parking spaces from specific residential units and encouraging commercial shared parking can further extend the usefulness of existing and proposed spaces.
- Provide enough loading/drop-off/pick-up zones to reduce/eliminate double parking.
- Explore maximums for off-street parking.
- Reducing parking would save residents more than \$8,500/year, which will aid the BRA’s goal of affordable housing. (This is based on the estimate that car ownership costs an average of \$8,500/year.)

In addition to these general recommendations, the plan should also address and mention specific infrastructure improvements to existing deficiencies, including the following:

- Create a road diet for Columbus Ave between Egleston Sq. and Jackson Sq.
- Add bump outs/curb extensions to narrow crossing distances and increase turning radii for vehicles turning right onto Washington St from Columbus Ave.
- Add visual cues such as rapid flashing beacons and other high visibility signage to slow northbound traffic on Columbus Ave coming downhill through Egleston Square at Washington St.
- Add and improve crosswalks throughout the study area.
 - Add raised crosswalks on all side streets along Washington and Columbus.
 - Add a crosswalk, preferably raised, with an in-street pedestrian crossing sign across Washington St at Beethoven St and across Washington St at Kenton Rd.
 - Add crosswalks with in-street pedestrian crossing signs across Columbus Ave between Washington St and Seaver St, and across Washington St between Columbus Ave and Dimock St, to enhance pedestrian connections to and surrounding Egleston Square. (Currently there are very few crosswalks across the major arterials of Columbus Ave and Washington St along the aforementioned roadway segments. New crosswalks may be located at side streets or midblock, depending on the circumstances.)

- Fix the WALK signal across Columbus Ave outside Walnut Park Apartments (between Weld Ave and Dixwell St) to shorten wait time and provide regular pedestrian phase. Currently the wait for a WALK cycle is very long even when the button is pushed.
- Widen the sidewalks on Amory Street from the Brewery Complex to School Street to a minimum of 8’.
- Establish wayfinding and pedestrian/bicycle links connecting and directing people from the Southwest Corridor, T Stations and Washington St to Franklin Park.
 - Page 130 of the draft plan states that connections should be enhanced between the Southwest Corridor and Franklin Park. Maps and diagrams of proposed improvements should be updated to reflect this in the final plan.
 - Page 152 of the draft plan cites proposed improvements for Egleston Square, including “new bike lanes, crosswalks, and connections to the Southwest Corridor.” Ideally these bike facilities should be two-way and protected from vehicle traffic. As with connections between the SW Corridor and Franklin Park, such proposed improvements should be consistently mentioned throughout all maps presented in the final plan.
- Install parking meters with 12-or-more hour maximum time on all streets within 1000’ of a train station to better manage commuter parking.

Thank you again for presenting to our group in July and for this opportunity to comment on the draft plan. We appreciate your consideration of our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Boston Cyclists Union
 LivableStreets Alliance
 WalkBoston



LivableStreets

Rethinking urban transportation

